

Let us show to the world that our religion is not only an insurance policy for the world to come, but that it furnishes a perfect program of life for this world. And may we also learn from the study of this topic that "Christianity is not to be played with but to be put into practice. That it is not a toy but a business; not an avocation but a vocation. And finally, that it is not an incident of life; it is all of life."

SOME QUESTIONS

- 1 What do you understand by the topic, "Practice Christianity?"
- 2 Is Christianity fully practiced today?
- 3 Would many forms of evil continue to exist in the world if Christianity was practiced?
- 4 What is Christianity's greatest proof?
- 5 How can we best practice Christianity? (Let each member of the society answer.)
- 6 What would Christianity do for society if it was fully practiced?

WM. D. FURRY.

Hindered Prayers

Christian Advocate

If all prayers offered by those who profess to believe in God were answered, what a different world this would be, and how different our churches would be! Many prayers have been answered, and the answers have been so definite, so specific, so positive, that the most skeptical witnessing them have been convinced. Other prayers have been answered in a different way. God has sent a response, not in the precise form indicated in a petition, but in another and better form. He determines the form of His answer. When Paul prayed for the removal of the thorn the answer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." When the Son of man prayed in the garden, being in an agony, and saying, "Let this cup pass from Me," an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen Him.

In such cases what takes place is not always recognized as an answer from God. Yearning souls have sometimes waited long, looking still for the answer to their prayers after it had actually come upon them. Perhaps some who wait and wonder why they have been denied will never know that they have already received an abundant answer to their prayers until the fact shall be revealed to them in the light of eternity. We should not be in haste, in any case, to declare that our prayers have not been answered.

There still remain multitudes of prayers which have not prevailed. Something has hindered. They have gone up from the lips of men and women, often in the best form but they have brought no blessing down. What has hindered? Why do we not at this time witness far more wonderful things in the world in answer to the prayers of Christians?

In the time of the prophet Isaiah it was necessary for the people who called themselves the people of God to be informed that their cruelty, oppression, and murders had hindered their prayers. The hand of the Lord was not shortened, nor was his ear heavy, but the sins of the people had separated between them and their God so that he would not hear them. It is not necessary to tell Christians in this day that murder, cruelty, and tyranny will hinder prayer.

We all know full well that it is useless for the bloody and deceitful man to call on God so long as he continues to live in sin and wickedness. We are not liable to forget this. But there are hindrances which we may forget.

An unforgiving spirit hinders prayer. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses." It is vain to approach God for the forgiveness of our own sin or for any other good while we indulge in a spirit of revenge and hate. Many heavy-hearted men and women are now crying to God for help, which they shall not receive because they cherish a spirit of resentment against those who have wronged them. O, the bitterness that professing Christians carry with them to the throne of grace! No wonder that the windows of heaven are closed. This bolt must be removed before the showers for which they cry will fall.

The Bible clearly teaches that the prayers of those who are deaf to the cry of the poor shall not prevail. Our heavenly Father has showered his bounty on us, not that we may use it selfishly, but that we may imitate him, bestowing on others the good they need. He has given us the opportunity to imitate him by surrounding us with those who are needy. When we cherish a selfish and niggardly disposition with regard to the bounty he has bestowed on us, we shall pray in vain. Only an unselfish, open heart can offer an acceptable prayer. A hard, penurious, unkind spirit hinders prayer.

Secret sins hinder prayer. Sin is deceitful. It often hides successfully. Men who appear to be living a life of prayer may be living a life of sin. In some cases their dishonesty and impurity are not discovered or even suspected by their neighbors. They may hide the real life they are leading from their most intimate friend. But God, who seeth in secret, will not hear them. So exceedingly sinful is sin that it often deceives those who indulge it. They think themselves to be in the right way. They believe their hearts are right with God. They flatter themselves that they are on the way to heaven. When they pray it is not a mere pretense. They believe in prayer and in the Bible. They earnestly desire the things they ask of God. But sin has deceived and blinded them. They are covetous, or dishonest, or cruel, or unjust, or in some way living in sin, and know it not. Let no one think there is no danger. Every wise man will pray to be delivered from secret sin.

"One thing alone, dear Lord, I dread,
To have a secret spot
That separates my soul from Thee,
And yet to know it not."

Surely this is an evil to be dreaded. Is not this the secret of so many fruitless prayers?

Prayers are often hindered by indifference. How often does the suppliant approach the throne of grace with a listless spirit. He does believe in God, but his faith is so weak that it makes little impression on his mind.

He does desire the good he asks, but his desire is so feeble that he can scarcely feel it. It is not a burning desire, consuming his spirit. He is much more interested in the trifling things of the world than in the spiritual good of which he speaks to God. Prayer is on his lips, but something else is in his heart. His knees are bended, but his heart is lifted up. It is the prayer we do not feel that fails to reach the ear of God.

These are only a very few of the most common hindrances which neutralize our prayers. The disciples requested the Lord to teach them how to pray. How few persons know how to pray! How little real prayer God hears! We pray outwardly every day, but how seldom do we pray inwardly! We need the spirit of prayer. We have been taught to pray in the Spirit. If our prayers were offered in the Spirit, if the Holy Ghost were permitted to teach us what to pray for, and to make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, the arm of God would awake, and Jerusalem would put on her beautiful garments.

Christian Life

In Sorrow

Gently, Lord, O gently lead us,
Pilgrims in this vale of tears,
Through the trials yet decreed us,
Till our last great change appears.
When temptation's darts assail us,
When in devious paths we stray,
Let Thy goodness never fail us,
Lead us in Thy perfect way.

In the hour of pain and anguish,
In the hour when death draws near,
Suffer not our hearts to languish,
Suffer not our souls to fear;
And, when mortal life is ended,
Bid us in Thine arms to rest,
Till, by angel bands attended,
We awake among the blest.

—Thomas Hastings.

ONE WAY OF HELPING THE MINISTER

WASHINGTON GLADDEN

There is considerable difference among the theories of the various churches as to the nature of church government. Some of these theories assign to the pastor more power than others concede to him; some of them give the people a larger place in the government of the church than others do; but the practical differences are much less than the theoretical. In all our Protestant churches there are leaders, to whom is given the responsibility of organizing and directing the work; and in all these churches the duty of the members to co-operate with their leaders in carrying on the work is clearly understood. The pastor is always expected to be a leader, and the people, in their theories, acknowledge their obligation to support him. They may deny that he has authority over them; but they admit that, by counsel and suggestion, he is to guide them in their united efforts to do good.

It is evident that every organization which